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SUMMARY OF TRENDS OF GERMAN PUBLIC OPINION

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA
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ICD OPINION SURVEYS
OMGUS APO 742
Berlin Germany

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Since the first of November, 1945, ICD Opinion Surveys has investigated continuously the state and disposition of public thinking on problems of interest to Military Government. During this period some particular questions have been asked again and again of different samples of the population. Since the methods of inquiry and the basic structure of the samples have remained constant, variations in the replies given at different periods indicate changes in the outlook of the German people toward the issues posed.

A complete report will be issued in February, 1948, charting the dramatic changing currents of popular opinion. That report will show results through January, 1948, on many of the issues. In anticipation of the full report a summary is presented here which takes into account the material presently available -- data indicating German opinion over a span of two years.

* * *

MATERIAL DIFFICULTIES ...

Food

In reply to the question: "What are your chief cares and worries at the present time?" most people have consistently referred to food. A slight seasonal effect has been observed, with somewhat fewer mentioning difficulties with food after each harvest in the late fall and early winter. However, throughout the period, more and more people have spoken about difficulties in this regard. In November, 1945, about one-fifth (20%) of the population spoke to this point. This figure held, on the average, until March 1946. With food rations cut at that point, the figure rose to 30% and to 40% and held in that range until February 1947. Since that date the curve has gone still higher until today it consistently represents about half (50%) of the people.

In Berlin, mentions of food have been more frequent than in the Zone. The figure in March, 1946, was 52%, today it is 57% ... after the harvest. This represents a drop from 74% from July of this year just preceding the harvest.

Fuel

Number of mentions of fuel have been rigorously seasonal -- worries drop to almost none during the summer, but rise sharply in September and reach a peak in February. However, the peak in the Zone during the winter of 1946-1947 (the worst winter in 50 years) was 14%.

In Berlin, during the same winter, the most frequent number of mentions of fuel as a worry was 41%. (At the same time, 64% said their greatest worry was food. Thus, when the cold was something almost no one could escape, and was something with which a large minority was seriously concerned, many more people said that food scarcity troubled them. Every indication points to high intensity and serious concern with the problems mentioned in reply to the question.)

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Other Worries

An average of one and a half mentions of a specific "chief" worry is given by the people questioned. Mentions of clothing and shoe shortages have been on the upgrade. In 1945, about one in ten (8%) persons spoke about this; in 1947, the number is more than four times as great (35%). The percentage worrying about PWs has slowly decreased. The first figure was 24%, the last 16%. The number who say they have "no" worries has practically vanished. In 1945, as many as 18% claimed their troubles were only normal; today the figure is 3%.

When the public is asked: "Is the entire income of your family high enough to cover necessary expenses?" seven in ten persons answered "Yes" in January, 1946. In October of that year the number began to decrease and in August of 1947 the percentage replying "Yes" was 58. A rise in some few official prices and an increasing necessity to have recourse to the black market for some food has undoubtedly occasioned this reduction.

LOSS OF CONFIDENCE ...

Over a wide field of inquiry the public indicates great and profound changes from the confidence which was formerly exhibited.

Politics

In the fall of 1945, people were asked: "As you know, political meetings are again permitted. Do you think such meetings are desirable?" Seven in ten (69%) said they were desirable. In August, 1947, the number replying so was 45%, while 39% thought meetings were not desirable. The change in sentiment occurred within 1947.

Asked to state a preference for one of the organized political parties about one in seven (15%) liked "none" in late fall 1945. But as the campaigns for city elections and Land elections were held, crystallization of opinion was induced until only about one in twenty (5%) would not express a choice in June, 1946. After the June elections the hightened interest deteriorated so that by September one in five persons (20%) said they cared for none. This decline has continued until today still more (30%) say that "no party" suits their outlook on political affairs.

Local officials of the German government have continued to lose the confidence of their people. In August, 1946, a plurality (42%) of the public thought the officials were doing "good" or a "very good" job. Only half as many (22%) give the same credit in October 1947. Meanwhile, the number thinking the job done is "poor" has risen from 6% to 20%. The most common reply has become "fair" instead of "good" or "very good."

Asked: "Do you think the officials in the local German government work, in general, for the good of the community or primarily for their own interests?" a steady loss of favor has been observed. In 1945, six in ten (62%) thought the job done was for the good of the community. In late 1947, less than half the public (45%) replied similarly. The number thinking the job done is primarily a selfish one has risen from 12% to 42%.

One major criticism of German officials has been their seeming inaction in response to the food crisis. Public sentiment has completely reversed itself in this regard. In January, 1946 six in ten (60%) answered "yes" to the question: "In your opinion are the officials doing everything to overcome the black market?" In August, 1947, the percentage agreeing with this opinion is 18. Negative attitudes have risen from 14% to 74%.

Less of confidence in the Americans is also observed. Asked: "Do you think that the Americans have furthered or hindered the reconstruction of Germany?" seven in ten (70%) felt that good effects had been felt (November, 1945). In August, 1947, less than half the public (44%) answered similarly. Those who see bad effects from the American work in Germany have increased more than four times (from 7% to 32%).

Opinions toward the Allies as a group have been less favorable than opinions toward the Americans. On the question of Allied help or hindrance in the reconstruction of Germany, a plurality (43%) held a positive outlook in September, 1946. One year later this number had shrunk to a minority of 31%. Negative outlooks during this period have risen from 25% to 44%.

Similarly, confidence that the Allies will cooperate has radically deteriorated. Asked: "Do you think that the Allies will successfully cooperate to leave behind a united Germany at the end of the occupation?" as many as seven in ten (71%) looked toward cooperation in January, 1946. By September, 1947, only one in five (20%) believed this. Pessimism was voiced by 15% at the earlier date, by 70% in the fall of 1947.

Confidence in news sources has also declined. From a high of 75% reporting that they were reading a newspaper regularly in January, 1946, a decrease has been seen to 55% in the Fall of 1947. Indicative of the serious aspects of a feeling of confusion and loss of structured outlook on world affairs are replies to the question: "Are you sufficiently informed about present-day political affairs?" In 1945, half the public (50%) felt they knew what was going on in the world. In late summer, 1947, only one-third (32%) answered similarly. Negative replies have risen during this period from 39% to 67%. Of course, it cannot be assumed that people have forgotten what they knew or that it is not possible for them to find out about events in the world. What is significant is that they feel confused and distrust what they hear.

Further indication of public confusion is the fact that about four in ten persons in the fall of 1947 answer "yes" to the question: "Have you heard any rumors lately which have distrubed you?" In March, 1946, when a "war scare" seemed to sieze the entire German public, the percentage who said they had heard disturbing rumors was approximately the same (42%). Between these two periods reported rumors had fallen off greatly. Rapid circulation of rumors usually indicates a feeling that news sources are inadequate, it indicates a sense of insecurity, a lack of standards by which to judge events, and low confidence that established institutions will cope with the press of affairs.

Concomitant with loss of confidence in the Allies has been a consistent reduction in the number who would choose "Communism" over "National Socialism." This difficult choice was presented as follows: "If you HAD TO CHOOSE between Communism and National Socialism, under which form of government would you prefer to live?" In the Fall of 1945, one-third of the people (35%) said they would take Communism. In late 1947 the number expressing the same choice was only 4%. The major change seems to have taken place in 1946. During the same period, the percentage choosing National Socialism has risen from 19 to 33. The large number saying they like "neither" tripled in size during the period (from 22% to 66%) but latterly has begun to decline again (59%) as the number choosing "National Socialism" rises. (A second probe showed that the people answering "neither" were, in fact, divided on the basic proposition as those who answered directly to the first question ... that is, about eight for National Socialism to one for Communism in the most recent poll.)

During 1947, stability has been observed in replies to the question: "Which of these two forms of government would you personally choose as better: a) A government which offers the people economic security and a possibility of a good income, or b) A government which guarantees free elections, freedom of speech, press and religion?" About six in ten people (62%) have consistently chosen "economic security." This evaluation, taken in relation to the many expressions of insecurity, the real material distress, the marked loss of confidence in news sources, authority, and governmental institutional forms, probably indicates clearly the direction which the German people would take as a reaction the stresses and strains under which they are living -- if they had an opportunity to choose freely at the present time. Their choice does not indicate a rejection of the freedoms mentioned. It does indicate that a large body of the German public considers that guarantees of economic security are more fundamental and are to be sought whether or not along with them individual rights are also secured.

... As a further probe, people were asked to state which one of the statements they thought described the one most important result. Thereupon they were asked to choose the one which they thought described the second most important result. The averaged rank order of first and second choices is shown below. It will be noted that a lack of capable officials and businessmen again receive top mention. Also to be noted is the tendency of the non-affected public to minimize, more than the disaffected groups, those results which are limited to PGs themselves, not to German society as a whole.

The averaged rank order of first and second listings for the three groups is:

Meldebogen Group	Claimed PGs	Non-Affected
1. Businessmen removed	1. Officials removed	1. Officials removed
2. Officials removed	2. Businessmen removed	2. Businessmen removed
3. PGs in need	3. PGs in need	3. Democrats replace Activists
4. PGs shamed before fellow workers	4. Democrats replace Activists	4. Unemployment
5. Democrats replace Activists	5. Unemployment	5. PGs in need
6. Political leaders not developed	6. PGs shamed before fellow workers	6. PGs shamed before fellow workers
7. Unemployment	7. Political leaders not developed	7. Political leaders not developed

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